/ Voting for Diversity?
Political Attitudes and Formal Political Participation of Gay Men and Lesbian Women in Germany

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Abstract

*This paper uses original data from the **LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017** to examine political attitudes (Gabriel 2009), as well as formal political participation (Ekman/ Amna 2012), on the individual level (voting) and on the collective level (membership of parties, trade unions, and NGOs) of gay and lesbian citizens in Germany. The paper bridges the gap between conventional political participation research and queer studies and adds to both strands of research. It shows that the majority of gay and lesbian voters who participated in the survey support a progressive agenda and therefore vote for and engage with progressive and left-wing parties, since they tend to be more inclusive of the LGBTIQ* community. The most important issues for their voting decision were discrimination and homophobia, as well as issues like migration and the environment. Regarding formal political participation on a collective level, gay men are more involved in political parties than lesbian women who are instead active in NGOs.x*

Keywords: LGBTIQ*; gay; lesbian; voting; Germany; Bundestagswahl 2017

Voting for Diversity? Politische Einstellungen und formale politische Partizipation von schwulen und lesbischen Bürger_innen in Deutschland

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit politischen Einstellungen (Gabriel 2009) sowie formeller politischer Partizipation (Ekman/ Amna 2012) auf individueller Ebene (Wahlen) und auf kollektiver Ebene (Mitgliedschaft in politischen Parteien, NGOs und Gewerkschaften) von schwulen und lesbischen Bürger_innen in Deutschland. Die Mehrheit der schwulen und lesbischen Wähler_innen, die an der Umfrage teilgenommen haben, unterstützten dabei eine progressive Agenda und wählen progressive bzw. linke Parteien. Die wichtigsten Themen für ihre Wahlentscheidung waren dabei neben Diskriminierung und Homophobie, Migration und Umwelt. In Bezug auf formelle politische Partizipation auf kollektiver Ebene sind schwule Männer stärker in politischen Parteien engagiert als lesbische Frauen, die hingegen mehr in NGOs aktiv sind.

Schlagwörter: LGBTIQ*; schwul; lesbisch; Wahlen; Deutschland; Bundestagswahl 2017

LGBTIQ* people have "vote[d] like [their] rights depend on it."

(Proctor 2016: 121)

1. Challenging Research on Political Participation

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, inter*, and queer (LGBTIQ*) issues have been part of the political science literature for years. However, there is a crucial difference in the approaches of conventional political participation research – which is originally rooted in rational choice-induced voting – on the one hand and queer studies on the other hand. While political participation research is primarily based on clear-cut categories and sociodemographic indicators, the queer studies mostly employ de-constructivist and poststructuralist approaches. These problems are reflected in the current state of research as well. Within political sciences, studies dealing with LGBTIQ* issues are still questioned regularly and often framed as too political, too private, or simply not important enough (Hines/Santos 2018). Paternotte (2018), however, has shown in an overview that the field of LGBTIQ* politics in political science has been growing and diversifying in recent years. Not only has the literature on social movements been increasing (Ayoub/Chetaille 2020; Ayoub/Paternotte 2014; Swank/Fahs 2013) but also the analysis of representation and studies dealing with LGBTIQ* political candidates and their campaigns (Reynolds 2019, 2013; Magni/Reynolds 2018). Studies dealing with voting behavior and political attitudes of LGBTIQ* citizens are still scarce and have mainly focused on the United States (Schaffner/Senic 2006; Smith 2007; Hertzog 1996; Egan et. al 2008; Swank 2018) or Canada (Perrella et al. 2012). Herzog (1996) showed that self-identified lesbians, gays, and bisexuals comprised a distinctive and highly active voting bloc in electoral politics in the US. Thus, LGBTIQ* citizens vote cohesively across a variety of issues and at higher rates than the general population. Not only does their interest in politics seem to be above average, but furthermore it seems that sexuality shapes citizens' voting behavior (Hertzog 1996; Bailey 1999). For instance, studies show that LGBTIQ* voters primarily opt for leftist parties, such as the Democrats in the United States (Schaffner/Senic 2006: 130; Swank 2018: 34). In the context of Western Europe, Turnbull-Dugarte illustrated that similarly to the United States, LGBTIQ* citizens are more likely to vote for social democratic and other leftist parties (Turnbull-Dugarte 2020a, 2020b). Studies

that explicitly deal with the voting behavior and political attitudes of the LGBTIQ* community in German-speaking countries have only been carried out recently (de Nève et al. 2018; de Nève/Ferch 2018; Hunklinger/Ferch 2020).

This paper uses data from the *LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017* to examine the political attitudes (Gabriel 2009) and formal political participation (Ekman/Amna 2012) of gay and lesbian citizens in Germany. It looks at formal political participation on the individual level (voting) and on the collective level (membership of parties, trade unions, and NGOs). The expectation is that gay and lesbian citizens mostly—but not always—support a progressive agenda and therefore vote for and engage with progressive parties, since progressive parties tend to be inclusive toward LGBTIQ* people.

Against this background, this paper addresses the following research questions: How do gay and lesbian voters in Germany participate in politics (on an individual and collective level)? What are their political attitudes in regard to LGBTIQ* issues and social equality and which issues are most important for their voting decision?

The paper is structured as follows: First, it gives a short overview of the theoretical background of political attitudes and formal political participation and presents its methodological approach. Second, it analyzes the political attitudes and formal political participation of gay and lesbian citizens in Germany in the context of the 2017 Bundestag (federal) elections and discusses its findings.

2. Political Attitudes and Formal Political Participation

2.1 Political Attitudes

Political attitudes and value orientations are essential components of people's belief systems. They also play a central role in explaining political behavior, notably as intermediate variables between social structure and political behavior. In political science, however, the attitude concept is often applied without reaching the level of elaborateness of social psychology (Arzheimer 2008: 62). According to Gabriel (2009: 22), political attitudes are the not directly observable tendencies of individuals who react cognitively and/or judiciously to political facts. In this respect, political attitudes relate to political objects such as institutions, actors, actions,

situations, facts, and symbols. Political attitude objects can be

> "political ideas, ideologies, parties, politicians and their actions, policies, single institutions, and political systems as a whole. The variety of attitude objects implies different consequences for the characteristics of specific political attitudes concerning their formation, change-ability, accessibility and power in shaping individual behavior" (Bauer 2020: 14).

Egan (2012: 598) highlights the importance of identities as both causes and effects of distinctive political attitudes. Identities have been shown to be powerful predictors of vote choice, party identification, political participation, and attitudes to public policies—with the result being that individuals who share an identity can exhibit remarkable levels of cohesion with regard to political activities and beliefs (Egan 2012: 597). Party identification—understood as a long-term, stable psychological bond to a political party—is not only considered a key factor in election research, but it is also believed to have a strong impact on political attitudes and behavior in general (Abdelal et al. 2006; Arzheimer 2012; Schoen/Weins 2014). There is a distinction between expressive and instrumental theories of selector behavior. The former view the individual's election decision as an expression of social and psychological ties between the voters, the latter as an instrument to assert political interests and goals (Wüst 2003: 33). Classically, the democracy-theoretical relevance of election promises is attributed to the acceptance of the mandate theory of democracy, according to which rational citizens choose a party based on the greatest possible congruence of their own attitudes with the political content (e.g., election promises) offered by that party (McDonald/Budge 2008).

2.2 Formal Political Participation

As Ekman et al. (2016: 1) put it, the "way in which citizens get involved in politics, as voters, activists or protesters, remains one of the most studied phenomena in social sciences." However, there is still a big blind spot when it comes to LGBTIQ* citizens. Political participation is undoubtedly important in any democracy and is a keystone of enfranchisement that allows citizens to engage with the state. Moreover, participation in the electoral process is one of the core responsibilities in democratic societies. Especially for minority groups, "participation in decision-making has both instrumental and intrinsic value in challenging oppression and

domination […], it is instrumentally valuable because it means that all interests will be voiced" (Fletcher 1998: 203–204). This paper I examines *formal political participation* (Ekman/Amna 2012), looking at it on the *individual level* (voting) and on the *collective level* (party membership). It focusses on voting as *the* form of political participation because it "was perceived as the primary way for citizens to make their voice heard in the political system" (Ekman et al. 2016: 2). Analyzing voting is a crucial part of understanding political participation, since even today, "elections […] are not only the most general, but also the simplest and most egalitarian form of political participation" (Schultze 1998: 471). This is especially important when looking at people who belong to a minority who might not have as many resources to take part in political participation activities as people who belong to the majority. Moreover, in much of political science, there appears to be a normative assumption that voting is the best way to participate in a democracy (van Reybrouck 2016: 136). In addition, voting turnout "has been described as the most commonly used measure of citizen participation" (Ekman et al. 2016: 2).

Of course, political participation occurs in a vast range of ways and voting is merely one of the more institutionalized forms. Therefore, political science has moved toward a broader conceptualization of participation that includes the multitude of so-called "alternative" or "unconventional" modes of participation and participation research has developed different categories over time to typologize them (Hoecker 2006; de Nève/Olteanu 2013). Studies that include an analysis of minorities' voting behavior mostly focus on ethnic minorities. Several of them have looked at the impact of social capital attributes on the probability of voting by ethnic minorities (Bevelander/Pendakur 2009: 1407). Political participation is an effective strategy to improve the cultural integration of, and respect for, different identities within societies (Rahman 2000; Carneio/Menezes 2007: 69). Most empirical studies show that ethnic minorities are less active in politics than members of majority groups and that socioeconomic factors, such as age, income, and education, can largely explain the low participation rates of minorities (Sandovici/Listhaug 2010: 113). On the other hand, exclusion sometimes can also lead to more political engagement and excluded individuals or groups seem to "possess a set of social-perceptual and social-cognitive skills that might aid in finding promising re-affiliation partners" (Claypool/Bernstein 2014: 571.) As Ayoub (2016)

has shown, visibility is a crucial element of the action potential of minority groups. Swank and Fahs (2010: 70) point out the importance of the effects of publicly embracing one's sexual orientation, since "several studies have found that out or fully queer sexual minorities are more politically active than their counterparts who routinely hide their sexual orientation." In many cases, discrimination increases group consciousness and thus provides a motivation that is necessary for a person to participate in politics (Proctor 2016: 114). However, the minority status is ascribed rather than individuals choosing to join this label. This discrepancy has several interesting societal and theoretical implications. It highlights the problematic nature of the minority concept itself, which is even more aggravated by survey/category-based social science research, where certain categories of identification are constructed from outside. Many studies suggest that the frequency of political activism was roughly the same among gay and lesbian individuals (Jennings/Andersen 2003; Rollins/Hirsch 2003; Swank/Fahs 2011). As Herek et al. (2010) show for the US case, there are some gender differences regarding the electoral activism of gay and lesbian citizens. While gay men tend to write more letters to politicians and make larger financial contributions to political candidates, lesbians tend to wear more political buttons. Moreover, according to Lewis et al. (2011), gay men participate in gay and lesbian rights protests slightly more frequently than lesbian women. O'Toole and Gale (2013) stress the importance of researching minority groups as a means to understand just how participation norms are evolving. As Hines and Santos (2018: 37) put it, the

> "construction of citizens as those who are able to participate publicly in decisions that affect their lives, and to make claims which are heard and recognized, brought to light new layers of exclusion, as well as new opportunities to frame citizenship beyond a narrow understanding of a strictly social and political set of formal rights."

3. Data and Method

3.1 Background and Method

This paper presents data on the political attitudes and formal political participation of gay and lesbian citizens in Germany and thus shines a light on a part of society that has so far received almost no attention in electoral studies in Germany (de Nève et al. 2018). It focuses on the national level, more specifically on the

electoral arena in Germany. Germany is chosen as a case since the antagonism regarding legal equality and simultaneous increasing social polarization shows itself particularly well here. In October 2017, "marriage for all" (*Ehe für alle*) was introduced, thus fulfilling a long-standing demand of the gay and lesbian movement. At the same time, with the entry of the right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party into the German Bundestag in September 2017 and the previous Bundestag election campaign, the polarization of LGBTIQ* rights increased sharply (Hunklinger/Ferch 2020). Moreover, in Germany—as in all of Europe—gender binarism is highly institutionalized in the political and cultural system, including welfare and labor market polices, which are based on primarily heterosexual family models (Leitner 2003: 368; Leitner 2014: 40–41). Furthermore, legislation regarding the LGBTIQ* community is not as progressive as one would presume, given the country's high international reputation (Hunklinger/Ferch 2020; TGEU 2019).

As yet, very little is known about the voter preferences and political attitudes of non-heterosexual citizens (de Nève et al. 2018). One main obstacle is the lack of data: in general, empirical research on electoral behavior and political preferences is essentially based on representative surveys. However, one of the major preconditions for the realization of a representative survey is knowledge of the distribution of the characteristics of the population under examination. Against the backdrop of discrimination and (criminal) prosecution of the LGBTIQ* community in Germany in the past (Gammerl 2010) and present (Heitmeyer 2012; Decker et al. 2016), this precondition for a representative sample cannot be fulfilled in the case of LGBTIQ* citizens. Thus, exit polls or other surveys in Germany do not include questions concerning sexual orientation or gender identity. The methodological problem of lacking figures on the LGBTIQ* community within the general population is insurmountable in a free and democratic society but addressing LGBTIQ* individuals by means of an anonymous online survey enables us to nevertheless reach out to this so-called "special population" (Gabriel/Keil 2014: 834) via a random procedure. For the first time in Germany, we collected data with the help of an online survey in the run-up to the most recent general election in Germany: the *Bundestagswahl* (federal election) of September 24, 2017. The survey was available on the internet for six weeks prior to election day and contains questions on voting preferences, attitudes toward the political

system and relevant and salient political issues, as well as political participation and engagement. A special characteristic of this self-selective (Häder 2014: 11) method of data collection lies in the assumption that the individuals under examination are in regular contact with one another within a subculture (Dannecker/ Reiche 1974). In this way, LGBTIQ* citizens can be considered as members of a sort of hidden subculture (Gabler 1992: 50). The advantage of this method lies in the fact that the respondents actively and freely decide to take part in the study. The main disadvantage of the method, however, remains its self-selectivity and the asymmetrical distribution of the range of the internet (Häder 2014: 12)—access to participation cannot be controlled in such a convenience sample. We assume that only LGBTIQ* individuals with internet access, corresponding technical skills and equipment, as well as an affinity with networking in the (virtual/digital) LGBTIQ* community, would have noticed or participated in the survey at all. Attempts were made to combat the difficulty of self-selectivity by making use of targeted online and offline promotion. This included targeted advertising on Twitter and Facebook, cooperation with LGBTIQ* community organizations such as the Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland (LSVD), as well as advertisements on LGBTIQ* dating websites.

3.2 Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Sample

In total, 5,329 participants identifying as LGBTIQ* and as eligible to vote in the 2017 Bundestag election completed the survey; of them, 3,123 individuals identified as gay men and 1,140 as lesbian women. Given the methodological complexity, this data is not representative and does not necessarily reflect the demographic composition of Germany. All conclusions in the remainder of this article are drawn with regard to the participants of the study, not the German LGBTIQ* community at large. The participants come from all states (*Länder*) of the Federal Republic of Germany and their age span ranges from 18 (which is the legal voting age for general elections in Germany) to 75. 44% of the gay and 56% of the lesbian participants hold some kind of university degree. 77.6% of the gay and 75.5% of the lesbian citizens identify as being part of the middle class; 7.9% (gay) and 8% (lesbian) identify as being part of the working class. The majority of the people taking part in the survey state that their economic situation is good (46.7% of the gay and 46.1% of the lesbian parti-

cipants) or very good (14.4% of the gay and 11.5% of the lesbian participants; LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017).

4. Political Attitudes of Gay and Lesbian Citizens in Germany

4.1 Out Candidates, Solidarity, and Agenda

Of utmost importance for the participants of the survey are LGBTIQ*-friendly policies of parties and candidates. 94.7% of the gay voters and even 98.4% of the lesbian voters think that it is very important or rather important that political parties or candidates have an LGBTIQ*-friendly agenda. Whether or not political candidates are out is not as important. Still, 47.9% of the gay men in our survey think that it is very important or rather important to have political candidates who are out and 56.3% of the lesbian women in our survey share this opinion. However, it is crucial for candidates and parties to express solidarity with the LGBTIQ* community if they want to win their support: 88.8% of the gay voters and 93% of the lesbian voters think that it is very important or rather important that candidates express solidarity with the LGBTIQ* community.

As can be seen in figure 1, most important for the participants of the survey is that political parties and candidates have an LGBTIQ*-friendly program and that they express their solidarity. These findings hint that there is a high level of group consciousness within the gay and lesbian community. Gays and lesbians are often aware of the different forms of discrimination and challenges the LGBTIQ* community faces and therefore are conscious of their political identity. As Proctor put it, "group consciousness combines in-group politicized identity […] with a set of ideas about a group's relative status and the strategies that will be useful in improving it" (Proctor 2016: 114). This holds especially true if group membership has political relevance. LGBTIQ*-friendly parties and candidates play an important role in this context, since political actors can help to increase the skills necessary for citizens' political participation, such as political knowledge (Proctor 2016: 111). As early as the 1960s, the LGBTIQ* community recognized "the importance of both gay and gay-friendly politicians in securing gay rights, as political representation through electoral institutions is essential in achieving gay political victories" (Proctor 2016: 123). Moreover, personal contact with a candidate has a particularly powerful impact on encouraging

Figure 1: Out candidates, solidarity, and agenda
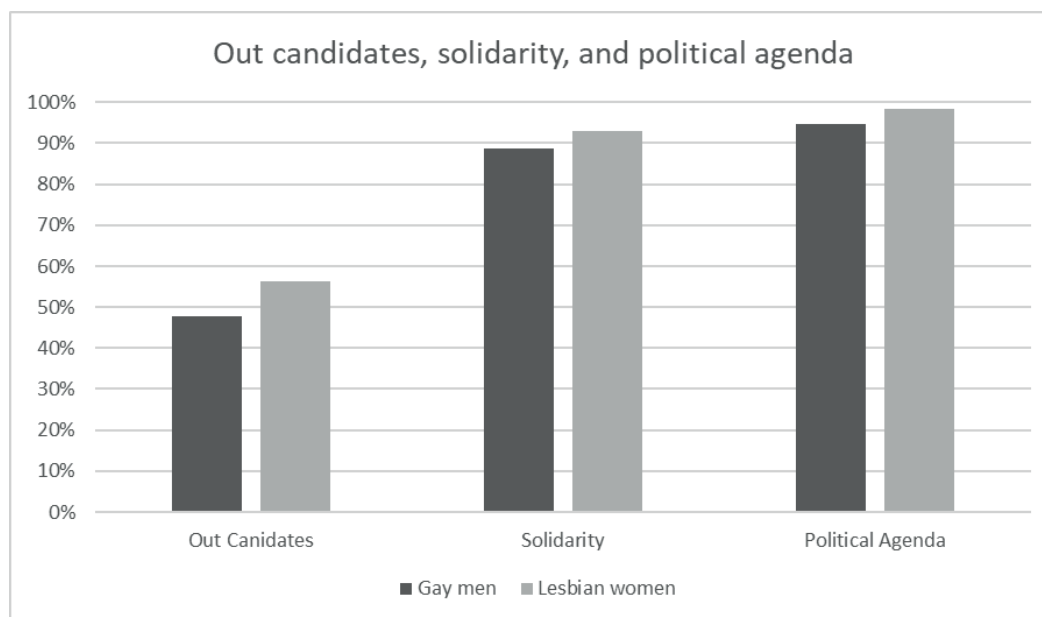
Source: LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017

political participation (Proctor 2016: 112). This might hold especially true for out candidates or candidates who openly support LGBTIQ* rights and gay and lesbian voters.

4.2 Part of the or an LGBTIQ* Community?

Community is, obviously, incredibly important to the gays and lesbians in the survey and these results confirm the findings of Sullivan (2003: 137) that community is clearly invaluable to people who identify as LGBTIQ*. 84.8% of the lesbian and 78.1% of the gay participants feel that they are part of *the* or *an* LGBTIQ* community. This might have to do with the fact that some of them do not have supportive communities within their own families, neighborhoods, and/or religions, and therefore seek each other out and create communities among themselves (ibid.). Howarth argues that "community is not a latent, abstract concept; instead, we find communities that give our daily practices, our political differences and our understanding of ourselves significance" (Howarth 2001: 225). Being part of *the* or *a* community enables gays and lesbians to persist in an often oppressive society. Thus, it could be suggested it is possible for gay and lesbian people to frame their positions of political participation through community ties. This links with ideas of sociological institutionalism. Communities can be seen as informal institutions that provide us with frames of meanings and a lens through

which we can view society (Hall/Taylor 1996: 947). In general, the framework of group consciousness accents the role that strong, disadvantaged, group-based identities play in structuring participation. As Proctor (2016: 116) put it, "by encouraging members to connect, share their experiences, and understand themselves in the context of the political world, group consciousness inspires group members to act in the political realm on behalf of their group." Often, for people who identify as gay or lesbian, community is imagined as a safe space (Sullivan 2003: 137). However, this does not mean that there is no sexism, racism, or trans*phobia within the LGBTIQ* community.

4.3 Homophobia

Homophobia is a pressing issue for an overwhelming majority of the participants in our survey. 97.2% of the lesbian women and 94.1% of the gay men identify homophobia as a very important or important issue. In both groups more than 60% say it is a very important issue. Homophobic discourse focuses on social discrimination with regard to gender identity and sexual orientation, including social perceptions and expectations of masculinity and femininity. The dominance of heterosexual life plans means that all sexual orientations deviating from the social norm are regarded as unnatural and inferior (Adam 1998: 388; Steffens 2010: 14). The term "heteronormativity," introduced by

Figure 2: Community and homophobia
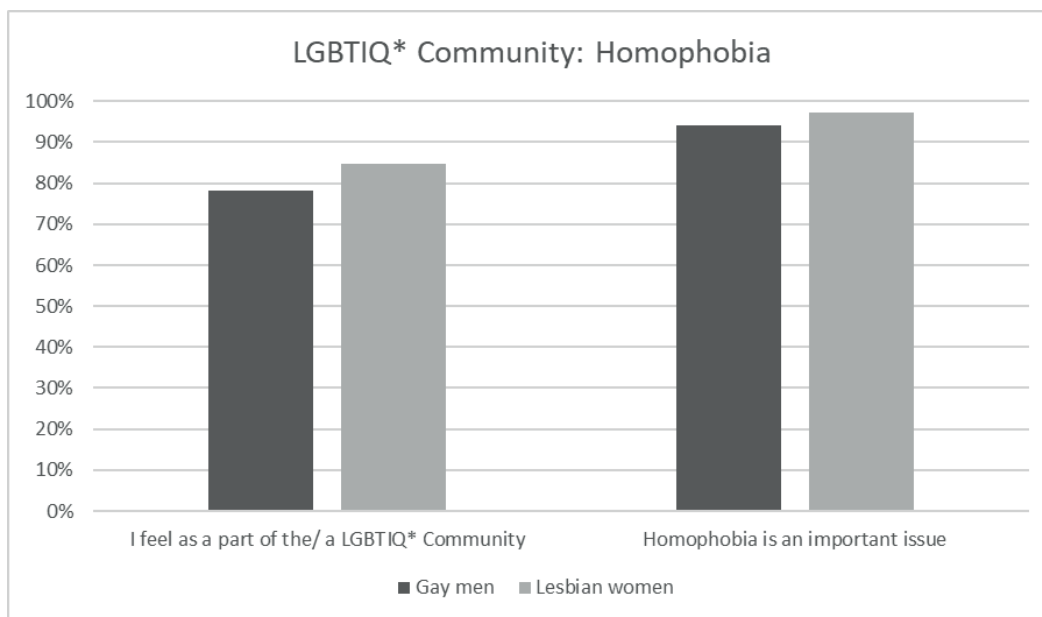
Source: LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017

scholars of queer theory, postulates heterosexuality as a social norm and the two-part gender system as the only desirable one (Woltersdorff/Logorrhöe 2003). In addition, the increasingly complex social challenges (crisis of migration, changes in the world of work as a result of globalization and digitization, drifting apart of rich versus poor and urban versus rural regions) increase the many people's experience of subjective insecurities and fears. The tendencies toward stereotyping and prejudice against minorities, which can be clearly observed in some cases, are growing especially but not only in the context of increasing racism and homo-/transphobia (Zick et al. 2011; Decker et al. 2016).
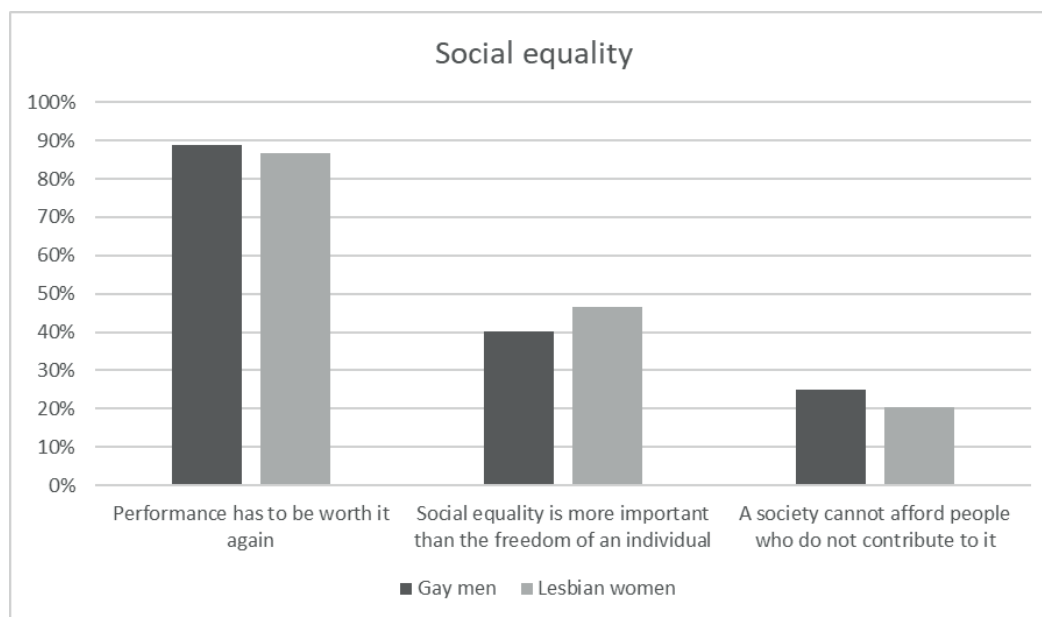
4.4 Social Equality

A vast majority of the participants in our survey agree that performance has to be worth it again ("Leistung muss sich wieder lohnen"). 88.8% of the gay men and 86.6% of the lesbian women support this claim that is usually made by liberal and conservative parties. This, once again, might have to do with the bias of the sample, as the majority of participants in the survey identify themselves as being part of the middle class or upper class. Asked whether social equality would be more important than the freedom of an individual, more than half of the male and female participants of our survey disagree. 40.3% of the gay men think that

social equality is more or somewhat more important than the freedom of an individual, whereas 59.7% disagree and highlight the importance of the individual. The support for the first claim is slightly higher among lesbians (46.7%) but nevertheless, the majority (53.3%) thinks that individual freedom is more important. The vast majority of the gays and lesbians in our survey disagree with the statement "A society cannot afford people who do not contribute to it." However, this claim is supported by almost a quarter of the gay participants in our survey (24.9%) and even a fifth of the lesbian voters (20.3%).

4.5 Intersectionality

The findings should be discussed within a wider context of intersectionality approaches, "which highlight the ways in which social and political forces manipulate the overlapping and intersecting inequalities within marginal groups" (Strolovitch 2007: 23). This leads to the circumstance that individuals might be marginalized in regard to one aspect of their identity (e.g., sexual orientation) but might find themselves in a more privileged group in regard to other aspects (e.g., white male). Therefore, "those who occupy multiple subordinate identities, […] may find themselves caught between the sometimes conflicting agendas of two political constituencies to which they belong, or are

Figure 3: Social equality

Source: LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017

overlooked by these movements entirely" (Cole 2008: 444). This has to be taken into account since our survey has a certain bias in terms of class, income, and education. In the context of social equality, it is especially important to highlight the high number of participants who are economically well situated. Undeniably, intersectionality offers a "series of interesting questions about the formation of coalitions, even if their stated or overarching goals previously differed" (Ayoub 2019: 2). Also inherent in the data is that groups often portrayed as uniform are indeed very diverse in their political attitudes. Our data suggest that gay and lesbian people have a high level of intersectional consciousness, which "may draw new people into movement mobilizations, and it may generate visibility for new narratives of how to understand the broader dimensions of any particular struggle" (Ayoub 2019: 24).

4.6 Most Important Issues

Besides the general importance of certain policy fields and political issues, we also asked for the single most important issue for the upcoming election (by means of a single-choice question). For the lesbian voters in our survey, discrimination (16.5%) was the most important issue in regard to the Bundestag elections in 2017, followed by migration/asylum at 11% and the environment at 8.7%, as well as education (8.4%) and marriage equa-

lity (7%). For the gay men in our survey, migration/asylum (13%) was the most important issue in regard to the Bundestag elections in 2017, followed by homophobia (8.7%) and discrimination (8.2%), as well as wages (6.7%) and the environment (6.5%). This shows that there is a variety of topics that are important to and influence the voting decision of gay men and lesbian women. Despite this, discrimination still plays a major role. Nevertheless, these findings have to be considered in the general political context of the 2017 election and the socioeconomic bias of our sample. Migration played an important role and dominated the political discourse in the run-up to the election, which could be one explanation for the relatively high quantity of times this issue was mentioned. Since the men in our sample vote more center/right than the women, it is also not surprising that the importance of the issue of migration is higher for the men than for the women. The fact that environmental issues are important for many participants in our survey might have to do with the high amount of support for the Green party and therefore a certain consciousness in this regard. In recent years, the most prominent issue for the LGBTIQ* movement has been same-sex marriage. But this does not mean that it is the most important issue for the gay and lesbian voters in our survey. Marriage equality was only the fifth most important issue for the lesbians in our survey. Among the gay voters it did not even make the

Table 1: Single most important issue

Gay men	Lesbian women
Migration/asylum (13%)	Discrimination (16.5%)
Homophobia (8.7%)	Migration (11%)
Discrimination (8.2%)	Environment (8.7%)
Wages (6.7%)	Education (8.4%)
Environment (6.5%)	Marriage equality (7%)

Source: LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017

top five. This replicates findings from Flores and Sherrill (2013), which demonstrate that same-sex marriage was not a top-five priority for LGBTIQ* voters in the United States. As Haider-Markel and Miller (2017: 625) showed for the US case, when "asked about the most important problems facing the LGBTIQ* community, 57% of respondents provided open-ended answers indicating social treatment, such as discrimination, and 32% cited legal rights or the right to marry." Against the background of the strong class/educational bias of the sample, the question arises as to what extent some of the answers with regard to voting preferences or the decisive "subject areas" (e.g., environment) result from the interplay of the respective class situation and LGBTIQ* identity. It will be important for future research to analyze those intersections.

## 5. Formal Political Participation of Gay and Lesbian Citizens in Germany

5.1 Formal Political Participation on an Individual Level (Party Preferences)

One central goal of the *LGBTIQ * Election Study 2017* was to examine the party preference of the participants for the 2017 nationwide elections in Germany. Since many gay rights issues (e.g., job discrimination) are still open for legislative action, "one should expect politically conscious LGBTIQ* persons to continue to use voting as a uniquely gay political behavior in the future" (Proctor 2016: 122). In the case of the election in Germany in 2017, the preference among all LGBTIQ* respondents for Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (the Greens, 29%) was obvious. This was followed by Die Linke (the Left, 22.6%) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD, 21.2%). This confirms the presumption that LGBTIQ* voters have a strong preference for left-wing and leftist parties and reproduces the results of studies that have been conducted in the US and Canada (Edel-

mann 1993; Hertzog 1996; Bailey 2000; Egan 2004; Egan et al. 2008; Schaffner/Senic 2006; Smith 2007; Gates 2012; Perrella et al. 2012) or Western Europe (Turnbull-Dugarte 2020a, 2020b). Among other things, these differences in the center-left spectrum may be due to the fact that the respective parties have special policies for specific sexual or gender identities or take up LGBTIQ* topics in general terms. The lesbian participants expressed a stronger preference for Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (36.1%) and Die Linke (22.7%) than the gay respondents (27% for Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and 18.3% for Die Linke). At the same time, gay men stated more often that they would support the Social Democrats (23%), the liberal FDP (12.7%), or the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU, 8.5%). Overall, the far-right AfD had little support among voters in our survey: 3.4% of gay and 1.2% of lesbian voters declared that they supported the AfD.

One explanation for this voting pattern are the party programs. The Green party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and the far-left Die Linke have the most differentiated policy offers for LGBTIQ* citizens. Both parties, as well as the SPD and FDP, see LGBTIQ* people and LGBTIQ* issues as cross-cutting issues. The conservative CDU/CSU does not mention LGBTIQ* people or LGBTIQ* rights in their 2017 election manifesto at all. The right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) uses LGBTIQ* rights and especially trans* issues to define themselves in a marginalized position vis-à-vis the mainstream political parties, a typical anti-elite and anti-system approach of populist parties. LGBTIQ* rights are an ideal battleground for those parties (Inglehart/Norris 2016). At the same time, the AfD tries to depoliticize LGBTIQ* issues by referring to privacy, which also implies that there is no need for regulations (e.g., in terms of legal equality) or that there are no means for public claims. Moreover, anti-LGBTIQ* positions can be understood as a unique selling point in the electoral competition in the context

*Figure 4: Voting (gay/lesbian)*
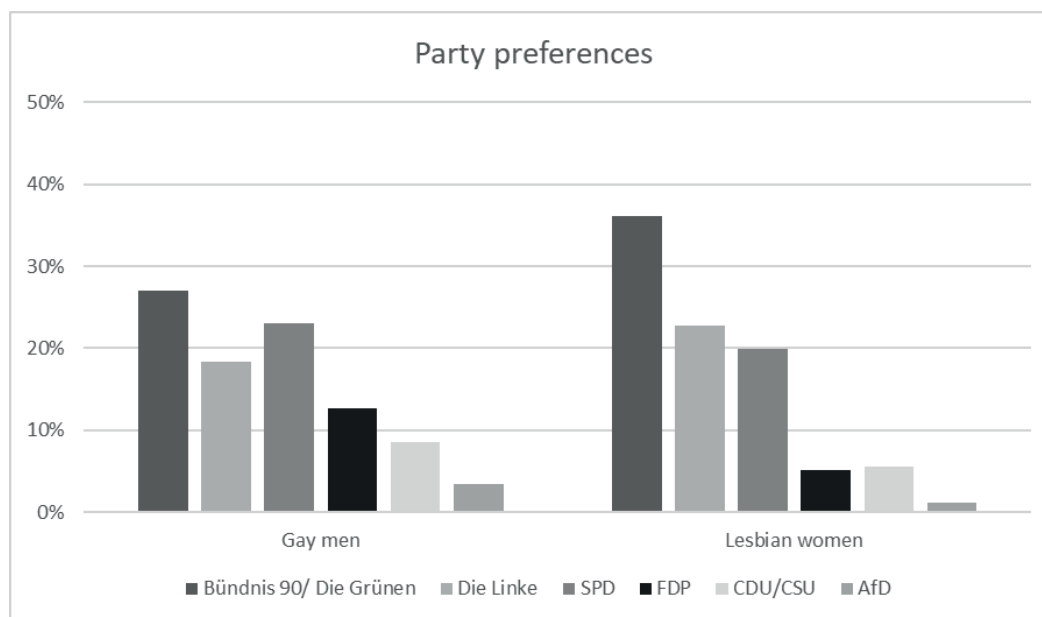
Source: LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017

of Germany, since most parties support or at least tolerate the existing status quo and do not openly agitate against LGBTIQ* people (Hunklinger/Ferch 2020).

Even so, voting is still one of the most important forms of political participation, I follow O'Toole and Gale's (1995: 129) argument that "emergent political subjectivities, new grammars of action and changing forms of socio-political identification" are becoming more and more significant. However, these other modes of political participation do not entirely override older forms of activity, but rather, they coexist with them (ibid). As our findings show, intersectionality plays a vital role in regard to LGBTIQ* voters, not least due to the different socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants in our survey. Therefore, "policy makers need to be aware that for many people in this group, legal and social aspects of citizenship are intertwined and mutually constitutive in a way that is different to other social groups" (Kuhar et al. 2018: 126). In order to make policy makers aware of LGBTIQ* issues, however, LGBTIQ* voters and their political claims or demands need to be visible and recognized by both politics and society. Moreover, the results reveal what studies in the US have showed before: LGBTIQ* citizens are as likely to register to vote and cast ballots as the general public and might be more likely to engage more strongly in other political activities (campaign activities, contacting officials, etc.; Flores/Sherrill 2016).

5.2 Formal Political Participation on a Collective Level

Apart from party preference, voting behavior, policy preferences, and attitudes, participants in the LGBTIQ* election survey were also surveyed on their formal political participation on a collective level. Community engagement is an integral facet of encouraging political participation. Therefore, the apart from party preference, survey asked whether or not (and if so, where or how) those interviewed would participate in politics and/or society. The survey shows that the majority of respondents are socio-politically active, and not only in regard to LGBTIQ* issues. As it is also the case with the general sample(s) of LGBTIQ* citizens, gay and lesbian citizens tend to be most active in clubs or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In general, the majority of the gay (55.8%) and lesbian (67.4%) voters who completed the survey stated that they were active in such associations. 41.7% of the gay participants are involved in a political party, while political engagement in a party seems to play a minor role among the lesbian women in our survey: only 19.1% stated that they were active in some form in a political party. This replicates the findings of previous studies that men tend to be more active in political parties than women (Dörfler/Kaindl 2019). About a fifth of the gay (19.6%) and lesbian (20%) respondents participated in some form of trade union activity.

Figure 5: Formal collective

Formal political participation on a collective level

■ Political Party ■ NGO ■ Trade Union
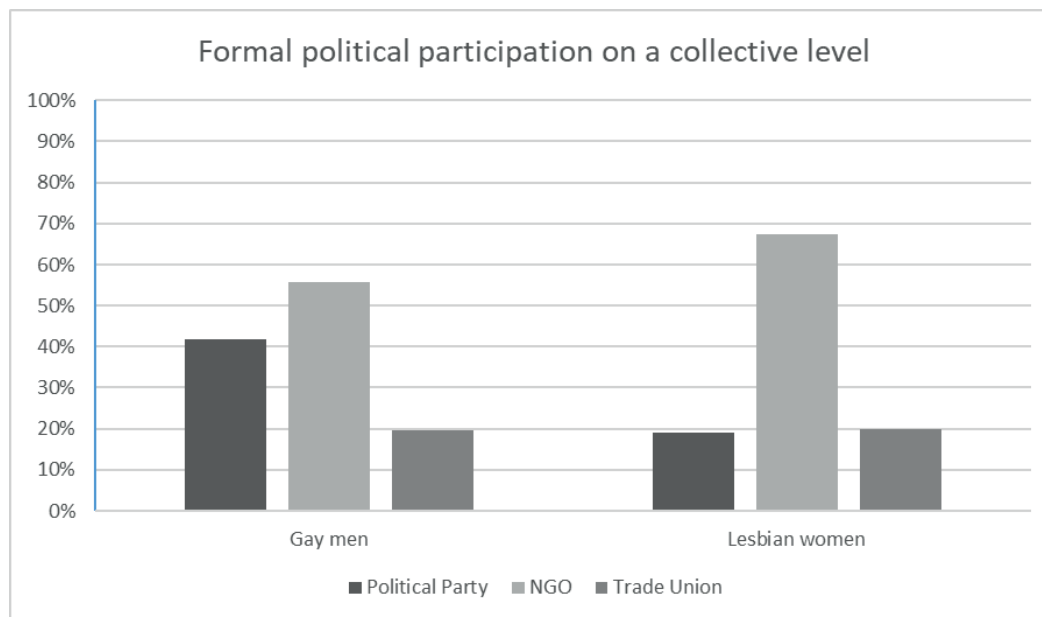
Source: LGBTIQ* Election Survey 2017

Once again, it is important to highlight that individuals might be marginalized in regard to one aspect of their identity but might find themselves in a more privileged group in regard to other aspects (Strolovitch 2007). Besides these traditional forms of political and societal involvement, gay and lesbian citizens are also active in politics and society in a broad variety of different, sometimes less-organized forms; for instance, in small local (autonomous) groups or as individual citizens (e.g., joining demonstrations). Our data once again confirm findings on gender differences in political participation that stress that women are less likely to consider formal political activities (Westle 2001) and are more likely to participate in participatory organizations such as NGOs and district work (Hoecker 1998).

Research demonstrates that using forms of formal social engagement, such as membership of political parties or trade unions, NGOs, or other forms of political activities, increases collective interest in politics and helps people develop the political skills that enable political participation (Harris 1994; Verba et al. 1995; Radcliff/Davis 2000). Moreover, those networks enable the social exchange of political information and expose individuals to new political information, which leads to an increase in their interest and understanding (Proctor 2016: 113). One can argue that this is especially important for minorities since the individuals in these groups face similar issues and cooperation with others

and organization around political (or social) issues enable change. Advocacy organizations in particular are very important in this context, since they often provide a safe space for marginalized groups. Besides, community ties provide social and human capital, which is necessary to be able to be active in political and civic life. Especially for young people, many of these community organizations "expose individuals to social networks of activists that facilitate longer-term engagement and retention" (Fisher 2012: 122).

When asked about political or societal involvement with an explicit focus on LGBTIQ* issues, part of the image changes. Two thirds (66.3%) of the lesbian and 59.6% of the gay voters surveyed stated that they were involved in NGOs with an explicit focus on LGBTIQ* issues. 32.8% of the gay men and 12.4% of the lesbian women stated that they were involved in political parties with an explicit focus on LGBTIQ* issues. Within our survey, there is very little political activity that focuses on LGBTIQ* within trade unions (among gay men: 4.9%) (among lesbian women: 4.5%).

Political parties and organizations could also draw on the high willingness of many homosexual voters to participate. However, social belonging and the accompanying challenges cannot be reduced to a single indicator. Even groups that are commonly represented as uniform (e.g., "lesbian women") are coalitions (Cole 2008; Murib/Soss 2015). They are situated at the inter-

section of an ensemble of complementary dimensions. Some scholars, like Nair (2010: 4), even argue that mainstream causes like gay marriage have played a role in the loss of the transformative potential of the LGBTIQ* movement. Proctor (2016: 117) points out that the forms of political participation that are relevant to each minority community may be different, indicating that not all groups will employ the same actions or venues across all issues.

6. Conclusion

This insight into the results of the *LGBTIQ * Election Study 2017* shows that gay and lesbian citizens in Germany are not one monolith but a diverse group of people with different backgrounds, voting behaviors, and attitudes. Nevertheless, the majority of gay and lesbian voters who participated in the survey vote left or center left. However, election preferences within the left-wing spectrum differ in terms of gender. While lesbian women expressed a stronger preference for the Green party and the left-wing party Die Linke, gay men rather support social democratic and liberal parties. One explanation for this could be the more inclusive party programs of the Green party and Die Linke and the fact that the vast majority of lesbian voters stated that a party's manifesto was very important to them. Moreover, environmental policies were more important to the women in the survey than to the men. For both lesbian women and gay men, discrimination was a very important issue. In regard to formal political participation on a collective level, gay men are more involved in political parties than lesbian women. In turn, lesbian women are more active in NGOs or in less-organized forms of collective participation; for instance, in small local (autonomous) groups or as individual citizens. Even though gay and lesbian citizens are less and less excluded in many societies, it is imperative to remember that while some aspects of living an openly homosexual life are becoming "accepted" by wider society, many forms of exclusion and discrimination are still a reality for non-heterosexual citizens. This often includes one's identity and beliefs being challenged by the norms of society, so simply to be is a political act. Therefore, being a gay or lesbian citizen is political because of the sheer fact of being part of a marginalized group of society. Moreover, the findings highlight the problematic nature of the minority concept itself, which is even more aggravated by survey/category-based social science research, where certain categories

of identification are constructed from outside. This challenges not only common notions of citizenship, but also enables us to think of citizenship in a broader and more inclusive way. Research on LGBTIQ* people and issues can disrupt traditional approaches in political science and add a new perspective to pressing issues within our societies.

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